



## **MEETING MINUTES / 15 December 2020**

**\*\*MEETING WAS CONDUCTED VIA ZOOM DUE TO COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS\*\***

### **ATTENDANCE:**

Present: Baldwin, Lopez, Miller, McMullen, Farley, Seppala, Lardizzone, Magner, Sarg, Camarillo

Excused: Sutton, Bradley, Phillips

Guests: Vince Kane (Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center), Carol Erhart (DVH), Dave Skocik (Friends of Delaware Veterans) Bill Conley (Warriors Helping Warriors) Nolan Lewis (AT-LARGE appointee)

**CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS:** (Baldwin) We have a fantastic group of Commissioners who are dedicated to helping veterans. The Office of Veteran Services is doing a great job helping veterans. Mr. Kane with the VA and Mrs. Erhart with the DVH are working very hard to assist veterans. We are very blessed to have some wonderful people working for veterans. A quick congratulations to Bill and his renewal to the Commission. Commissioner AT-LARGE, Nolan Lewis, has been appointed and will be joining us next month, congratulations.

### **MEETING MINUTES:**

Prior minutes motioned to approve by Sarg seconded by Magner.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE REMARKS:**

#### **Delaware Veterans Home (DVH) – Carole Erhart, Interim Director**

(Baldwin) I would like to begin with saying Mrs. Erhart is a breath of fresh air. Carole, you are doing wonderful and I love your communication. Please keep up the good work

(Erhart) Thank you for the support. It's a very difficult time this time of year for our veterans and families. DVH is back to phase 1 as mandated by the state. Each county has an average of 7.2% of the population testing positive for COVID. Residents are no longer able to eat in the dining rooms and back on units, restricting contact as much as possible. Face to face visitation is on hold and this has been communicated to the families as much as possible. If anything changes, we will notify families. At present, 0 residents with COVID, and 2 staff members with COVID. We have taken into consideration the difficulties during this time of year. We are doing pictures for residents uniquely for each family as a gift. The COVID vaccine is now in the state and we are putting a list together for staff that would like to get the vaccine. Any questions?

(Sarg) Your newsletters are fantastic. You say the vaccine will be available in January, is it voluntary for the staff?

(Erhart) Correct, the state is not mandating it as a condition of employment.

(Sarg) Are there any special programs to keep the residents occupied or entertained?

(Erhart) We have activities nightly from 10a.m. to 8 p.m., we are having fun here and trying to make the best we can of the situation. We have tablets and allow as much face time with families as possible.

(Sarg) What's the patient census?

(Erhart) 57, 0 patients testing positive for COVID.

(Sarg) What's your dementia count?

(Erhart) 16

(Sarg) Are the earliest possible admissions beginning January?

(Erhart) Yes

(Sarg) Do we have a backlog of admissions?

(Erhart) I do not have the answer for that. I am in the process of setting up a system to better operate the admissions process.

(Sarg) We will need to start from scratch as soon as possible on that.

(Erhart) I am working with the business office at this point to gather information. We will then put the admission committee together.

(Sarg) How is staffing?

(Erhart) We are well staffed at this point. I have the support of HR and Mr. Knight to maintain our future staffing.

(Baldwin) What is the plan for terminal residents and families?

(Erhart) We have a process in place for compassionate visits for end of life situations.

(Baldwin) That's great. If you had an instance where this occurs would Mr. Knight be involved?

(Erhart) Yes, he has been very supportive.

(Lopez) Can we have Michael send the newsletter to our commissioners?

(Erhart) Can you send the email addresses and we will be sure to have them on the list.

(Baldwin) Thank you Carole

## **Wilmington VAMC – Vince Kane, Director**

(Baldwin) I'm happy to have Mr. Kane with us as this is probably one of the most important meetings we have had.

(Kane) Happy to be here. There is a lot going on at the moment. We are expanding our testing platforms at the medical center for safety. We are expanding our virtual platform to further assist with medical care. We are amid a spike with COVID in the state. The numbers are high, we are seeing it here at the medical center. We are using some of the newer treatments with positive experiences. Since the peak, we have not had anyone requiring a ventilator. Our COVID patients are as high as 6 today, currently we have 3. We are treating patients and getting them home within a five to seven-day time period. Regarding the vaccine, we are anticipating the administration of the vaccine before the end of the calendar year. We are on the list for Moderna. We are not on the list for Pfizer. The anticipation is we could potentially have it before the Christmas holiday. There is a clear path provided by CDC to who and how the vaccine is to be implemented. High risk patients in long term facilities, medical staff in direct contact with patients, and veterans living in congregate housing all will be able to receive the vaccine. After the first batch we would be able to move into the community addressing the high-risk veterans. We can move the Moderna from our main facilities to the CBOC's safely and intend to have the vaccines at all locations. We are proceeding with the Dover clinic and still on track for a late January early February move to the new sight.

(Lardizzone) What's the status of the regional office building? I was informed it will not open until March.

(Kane) Construction is moving forward. We had issues with mold and asbestos remediation, as well as, COVID caused some issues with construction crews. We are about 4 months off pace. We are limiting the number of people on campus for the safety and well being of those in need of health care. Additionally, parking is limited due to construction on the parking garage. A lot is going on campus and we are focused on safety and limiting foot traffic.

(Baldwin) Is Moderna a double dose or single dose?

(Kane) Both Moderna and Pfizer are double dose. Moderna is easier to transport from one locality to another.

(Sarg) Will you be doing COVID testing at the new Dover CBOC, or will they have to rely on Walgreens services?

(Kane) Veterans are welcome to use the community. We are testing in CBOC's for pre-procedural at CBOC's. We are hoping to roll out self-testing within the new year, but if testing is required, we have the capabilities in our CBOC's.

(Sarg) How are we doing with establishing contract imaging services in Dover?

(Kane) That is one of the biggest uses of the mission act with radiology. When we constructed Dover, our hope was to do what we were able to do in Georgetown. At the time our budget did not permit it. We input the request this year. We have the space set aside. The goal is to have the capabilities within the organization.

(Sarg) When does the VA budget come out for the next fiscal year?

(Kane) The budget is out now. We have already placed the request and are awaiting a response at this time.

(Sarg) Are federal legislators aware of the limp back on the funding?

(Kane) Yes

(Baldwin) We are in a whole new profile with new legislators. If you need our voice with legislators, we will certainly do that.

(Kane) I do think we could use your help with that. We would love to partner with you and continue to support our veterans and their needs.

(Baldwin) Thank you Mr. Kane.

(Farley) We should make the inadequacy of mental health resources an agenda item. We know it is necessary if we ever want to dent the numbers of veteran suicides.

(Baldwin) Thank you Mr. Farley, we will put that on our agenda for discussion. Thank you, Mr. Kane, for your leadership and your teamwork to better veteran care.

(Kane) Thank you, I appreciate the partnership.

(Lopez) Thank you for the support of you and your staff on suicide awareness.

### **Home of the Brave, Director Jessica Finan:**

Not Present

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

(Baldwin) Introduces Dave Skocik, president, Friends of Delaware Veterans.

(Skocik) Thank you for the opportunity. We can spread the word top people that do not have the opportunity to be at the table. Certainly, people should be aware. Veterans Coalition is working to gain a Zoom license so we can provide this information to the masses. Paul Davis and I are registered lobbyists and we do communicate with our legislators, sometimes in mass. We are more than happy to approach legislators. I'm working with a VA rep, as well as, with a veteran that has been incarcerated to get him VA compensation and medical aid. The Friends of Delaware Veterans is being assisted by Gary Emeigh. He is giving 100 of his books for anyone who donates \$35 or more. Please do your best to get the work out on this. In the past 2 weeks Sherri Taylor and myself have sent out over 200 letters to different businesses to aid Delaware veterans and the Trust Fund.

(Baldwin) Dave, thank you for what you continue to do for everyone. Be sure to tell Paul Davis Thank you as well. Any questions for Dave?

(Sarg) Have you received any feedback on how the legislative discussion will be handled, virtual or live?

(Skocik) I can follow up on that and provide feedback.

(Sarg) They can't pass bills without community involvement. We need to know on what platform it will be held.

(Skocik) I agree, I will look into it.

(Baldwin) Thank you Dave, we have Bill Conley with Warriors Helping Warriors.

(Conley) Thank you, I am the Vice President of Warriors Helping Warriors. We opened 24 months ago the Brian Conley Veterans Resilience Center in Middletown Delaware. It took us 2 1/2 years to generate the funds to renovate the home. During that 24 months we've had 48 homeless veterans.

We have placed 24 veterans into independent living. As of last night, we have 12 men safe and supported in our home. October 31st, we received GPD approval and will be financially funded through the VA. We currently have 6 fulltime staff. We are excited for the journey and the process of getting motivated veterans safe and supported living and to move on to independent living. We would love for you to come out and visit once COVID is over. We would love to have a regular monthly invite as the Home of the Brave does. None of our veterans have contracted the COVID virus. This is a challenge because we try to get our veterans jobs in the communities so they can get some sort of self-value and income built up in a savings account. Thank you.

(Baldwin) Thank you and congratulations to you and your family. We will certainly make you a regular part of our monthly meetings.

(Farley) Congratulations to your success so far. Are you associated with the Dover Housing Alliance?

(Conley) I don't believe so.

(Farley) What most of the shelters and service centers do is report their veteran's status in a statewide data center to assist organizations such as yours.

(Camarillo) Bill, I am going to send you some resources as well.

(Baldwin) Thank you, we will have to move on.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

#### **Bear Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Commissioner Magner:**

Interments – 66 (-26)

43 Veterans, 23 Spouses

(Magner) Flags are flying and look new. There is one flagpole missing a flag currently.

(Baldwin) NABVETS is purchasing a flag for both cemeteries and will be utilizing that flagpole. What's the status of Wreaths Across America?

(Magner) The cemetery is working under the governor's guidelines for volunteers.

(Baldwin) Are the wreaths going up?

(Magner) Yes, on December 19th.

(Baldwin) Thank you

#### **Millsboro Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Commissioner Bradley:**

Interments – 34 (-5) (Provided by Commissioner Magner)

25 Veterans, 9 Spouses

#### **Health and Human Services, Commissioner Sarg:**

(Sarg) Reminder that the Senate and House have passed the 2021 NDAA Bill has been sent forward to the President for signature. That includes presumptive list for Agent Orange has been expanded.

They are now including a partnership for burn pit exposure between DoD and VA. I sent information out on Delaware Easter Seals regarding respite care. MOAA national still has a COVID relief fund.

#### **Legislative Affairs, Commissioner McMullen:**

(McMullen) I want to thank Ron Sarg for his hard work on the Legislative Concerns. I'm attempting to arrange a presentation through the veteran's commission sometime in early January when they first come together.

(Baldwin) I would like to mention that myself, Lopez, McMullen, and Sarg will be attending that committee hearing to present our legislative agenda.

### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS:**

DVTF Previous Month: Applications 2; Granted 1 (50%); Awarded \$1,622.85; Balance - \$74,150.67

(Matticks) I would like to go over the trust fund policy memorandum with the executive committee.

There are some abnormalities and loopholes to be tied up.

(Baldwin) We will set up a time with the Executive Committee to go over it with you. I called in to the office and the phones are not updated.

(Matticks) We will work towards getting that fixed

## **ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTS:**

Commissioner McMullen (Air Force Sergeants Association - AFSA)

Nothing to report. Chapter is not as active due to COVID.

Commissioner Miller (American Legion - AL)

AL getting a lot of requests for veteran's assistance. We are handling them internally.

(Baldwin) We found an issue specifically in Wilmington where they can turn off utilities. I have a meeting with the city regarding this issue. Thank you.

Commissioner Bradley (American Veterans - AMVETS)

Not present

Commissioner Lardizzone (Disabled American Veterans - DAV)

Served 68 veterans since last commission meeting.

5 VSO's assigned to Camden office.

4 requests for veteran's assistance.

DAV paid for a service dog that was given to an Air Force veteran.

Shutting down on December 18th and opening on January 4th.

Commissioner Farley (Marine Corps League - MCL)

Toys for Tots started a bit earlier because of COVID. We are still accepting toys. Thanks to the DAV, DOVS, and MOAA.

Holding our annual convention April 2021 in Rehoboth, DE.

Commissioner Sarg (Military Officers Association of America - MOAA)

January MOAA will start virtual meetings and get more active.

JROTC scholarship program in Kent County and will be actively fund raising for May scholarships.

Commissioner Magner (Military Order of the Purple Heart - MOPH)

Donated \$500 in food cards to Dover and Georgetown CBOC's respectively.

Donated \$500 to the VA hospital.

Doctor Carlton Cannon has been selected as the national chaplain for the MOPH.

Zoom meetings still hosted every Friday for veterans at the vet center in Wilmington.

(Sarg) Can you send me the point of contacts for the CBOC foodbanks?

(Magner) Will do.

Commissioner Phillips (Veterans of Foreign Wars - VFW)

Not present

Commissioner Baldwin (Vietnam Veterans of America – VVA)

Nothing to report

Commissioner Seppala (At Large, affiliated with Military Order of World Wars - MOWW)

Hosted first successful meeting via Zoom and will continue forward as such.

Co-Chaired annual Salute to Veterans, hosted 80 people via Zoom

Commissioner Lopez (At Large, affiliated with Delaware Veterans)  
Stand Down scheduled for September 17th.  
Crisis Awareness Committee Zoom meeting January 6th  
Resend the DVH newsletter.  
Bylaws will be sent out for review.

Commissioner Sutton (At Large)  
Not present. Working with a representative in district and Army Reserve center.

Camarillo (At Large)  
Guard had a virtual yellow ribbon event on Saturday. 140 soldiers participated.  
Mentions National Guard community support.  
Thanks DAV and DOVS for face-to-face work with veterans in the community.

**TERM COMPLETION:**

Nothing to report

**EVENTS:**

Wreaths Across America – December 19th

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

Commission Bylaws

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Nothing to report.

**ITEMS FOR THE GOOD AND WELFARE OF THE ORGANIZATION:**

VA webinar regarding COVID vaccine on Thursday.

**SPECIAL SESSION:**

Nothing to report

**EXECUTIVE MEETING:**

**Thursday, 14 January 2021 at 1000  
Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs**

**NEXT MEETING:**

**LOCATION:**

**Tuesday, 19 January 2021 at 1000  
Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs**